

NY Reps Demand Answers from Attorney General on Benefits for 9/11 Paramedics

Thursday, 03 January 2008

NEW YORK, NY – Representatives Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY), Vito Fossella (R-NY), Anthony Weiner (D-NY), Peter King (R-NY), and Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) today urged U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey to honor five private hospital paramedics, who responded to the World Trade Center attacks on 9/11 and are now permanently disabled as a direct result of their work, with benefits under the Public Safety Officer's Benefits Program letter to Mukasey (letter text available below).

The members of Congress wrote a similar letter to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales (letter text available below) last year and received no response. During that time, however, the Justice Department posthumously awarded a PSOB survivor death benefit to the family of a private hospital paramedic who died responding to the attacks. It is also believed that at least two other paramedics who lost their lives on 9/11 were posthumously awarded PSOB benefits. Additionally, the State of New York enacted a law last year granting private hospital paramedics the same benefits as municipal first responders.

"These heroes were there for us when we needed them most, and we should be there for them now in their time of need. It's unacceptable that the Justice Department has ignored this issue for over a year. Attorney General Mukasey should do the right thing and honor these heroes with the benefits they deserve," said Maloney.

"These heroes put their own safety and lives on the line to save others on 9/11. There is no reason that their cases should remain in limbo more than a year after they submitted applications. The Public Safety Officer's Benefits Program is designed to support first responders who are permanently disabled or their families if they are killed in the line of the duty. These four unsung heroes should have their cases resolved without delay," said Fossella.

"It's unacceptable that the Department of Justice has for the past year disregarded our request to recognize these brave paramedics for benefits," said King. "These men became permanently disabled while acting selflessly and honorably to save the lives of others on September 11th. They deserve better."

"These brave first responders put themselves in terrible danger so that they might save the lives of others," Nadler said. "To withhold benefits from the heroes of 9/11 is a shameful slap in the face."

Letter to Attorney General Mukasey:

"More than a year ago, we sent former Attorney General Gonzales applications for the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Act (PSOB) Program from five heroes of 9/11 David Sullins, Marvin Bethea, James Dobson, Michael Roberts and Bonnie Giebfiied-private hospital paramedics and EMTs who responded to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC). In addition, the Department of Justice later received an application from Scott Beloten, who was also dispatched to the WTC on 9/11.

In the time since the Department of Justice received the applications, we understand the Department has awarded Mr. Sullins' family a PSOBA survivor death benefit after he died responding to the attacks. We also believe that families of at least two other private hospital EMTs, Keith Fairben and Mario Santoro, who were also part of the New York City 9/11 system and were part of the response to the Trade Center attack and who died in the attack, received PSOBA survivor death benefits. We have not been able to confirm if a fourth paramedic from a private hospital, Yamel Merino who was

also killed on 9/11, received the benefit as well.

We understand that the Department has not yet told the five others-Mr. Bethea, Mr. Dobson, Mr. Roberts, Ms. Giebfried, and Mr. Beloten-whether or not they will receive benefits, even though they are reportedly permanently totally disabled as a direct result of their service. Because they all had the same employment status and causation of disability or death and there is no distinction under the PSOPA between eligibility for a survivor death benefit and a total permanent disability benefit, we do not understand the unacceptable delay in telling them whether or not they will receive benefits.

Also since you received the applications, the State of New York has formally recognized work of Mr. Bethea, Mr. Dobson, Mr. Roberts, Ms. Giebfried, and Mr. Beloten at the WTC site by enacting a law that gives nine private hospital EMTs and paramedics the same benefits as municipal first responders (New York State Law 2007 Chapter 689). The "9/11 Nine," which include these five employees, have now been awarded full benefits by New York State on par with their public-sector counterparts.

Now, over a year after submitting their PSOB Program applications, these five are still waiting for an answer. The heroes of 9/11 deserve better. We ask that you make every effort to respond to their applications and inform us of the outcomes as soon as possible, so that they can know whether or not to expect to receive benefits. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ben Chevat of Rep. Maloney's office at 202-225-7944."

Letter to Attorney General Gonzales

"Attached are the applications for the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Act of David Sullins, Marvin Bethea, James Dobson, Michael Roberts and Bonnie Giebfried. All were paramedics who responded to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. David Sullins died responding to the attacks. Marvin Bethea, James Dobson, Michael Roberts and Bonnie Giebfried are now permanently disabled as a direct result of their work in response to 9/11.

As the attached applications will demonstrate, these five individuals gave their all on September 11, 2001. They responded to the attacks heroically and unfortunately have sustained permanent disabilities, and in the case of David Sullins, died as a direct result. We ask that as you review these applications, all effort is made to provide whatever assistance is available to these individuals.

One of the truly bright spots on a truly tragic day was the response of all first responders - including this group of five paramedics. Their response on September 11th saved countless lives and their heroism, and the response of thousands of other volunteers from across our nation, demonstrated the resiliency and heart of the American people. They truly were the men and women running towards the Twin Towers as thousands were running the other way. They were selfless in their service to our country, and we ask that you take their heroic acts into consideration as you review their applications.

We appreciate your immediate attention to these applications. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Edward Mills in Rep. Maloney's office at (202) 225-7944."

###